

Using songs with young language learners

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There are many reasons to use songs with young learners but primarily perhaps is the fact that singing is a natural activity for children through which they play, learn and grow.

Songs can be used for all the language skills:

- (1) Listening (listening to the song - with or without activities)
- (2) Reading (reading to sing, following the lyrics to determine the words or to carry out reading tasks)
- (3) Writing (filling in the blanks – copying the lyrics)
- (4) Speaking (singing the song)

For learning, and especially language learning, songs offer an invaluable resource with a range of benefits:

- Songs lower any anxiety the children might have and help to create a safe atmosphere in the classroom.
- Children enjoy songs and the positive feelings and attitudes created in the language classroom transfer to the learning experience as a whole and to create, strengthen and maintain positive attitudes to learning English.
- They are fun so they motivate learners.
- Songs enable access to authentic language input and exposure to pronunciation, stress and intonation patterns.
- Using songs can add variety to a lesson, and can vary the pace. This helps to keep children interested and focused.
- Songs are memorable and often include patterns and repetition, which helps children learn language more easily.
- Authentic (non-EFL) songs and rhymes are also a vehicle of culture and thus promote awareness of the foreign culture.

In particular for very young learners:

Songs:

- can create/establish daily routines and promote feelings of safety in the foreign language classroom
- can allow for full participation in the language lesson, i.e. they allow for participation and indication of comprehension without forcing production.
- can function as the first steps/stages in speaking as they offer opportunities for practice of sounds, rhythm, intonation in the safety of the group
- can help young learners memorise vocabulary, grammar and chunks of language
- can provide access to different speakers

How can we use songs?

Some ideas:

Before students hear the song

- Pre-teach key vocabulary.
- Give children the song topic. In groups, they brainstorm all the vocabulary they can think of in 3 minutes.
- Cut up the lines of the song. Children try to put them in the correct order.

Children guess the missing words (gapped song)

- Children match key words from the song with pictures

**While children are listening*

- Children perform actions that go with different parts of the song.
- Children point to the words/pictures they hear.
- Children clap the rhythm of the song.
- Children hold up a word/picture card when they hear it in the song.
- Children put a set of picture cards in the correct order or in the correct place on a visual background.
- Pause the tape and have children repeat the last line.
- Pause the tape and have children guess the next line.
- Musical chairs
- Children fill in a gapped text of the song.
- Children tick off the words they hear from a list of words.
- Children sing – whole class.
- Children sing different verses in groups (e.g. boys/girls).
- Children sing – individuals.
- Children shout out ‘Stop!’ when they hear certain key words.
- Children stand up/jump/make a funny noise when they hear a certain word.

Follow-up activities

- Children come up with/write an extra verse.
- Children illustrate the song.
- Children make posters about the song.
- Role-play

**Ideas for while children are listening and follow-up activities were taken from the British Council website*

Which songs to use?

Select songs:

- you like
- are timely
- are interesting for your students
- which have suitable lyrics
- which are comprehensible (in their literal and metaphorical meanings)
- carry significant aspects of culture
- might have authentic uses of your target language (vocab. Grammar, etc.)

Songs for older learners (10-12)

Songs can still be fun and engaging for older learners but they have to be related to their age and interests. They usually can find songs interesting if:

- a) they are personally relevant to their teacher (e.g. the teacher decides to share his/her favourite song and musician)
- b) they are modern songs by famous artists (at this point in time this could be songs by Justin Bieber, Taylor Swift and other teen favourites)
- c) they are songs which are related to timely events (e.g. a visit of a famous artist to Cyprus, the Eurovision song contest, etc.)
- d) they are related to the culture of a town/country/people they are currently studying

Apart from specific songs with intercultural aspects, there cannot therefore be specific suggestions for this age group as the choice of songs will develop from the interests of the teacher and the students. *Be careful, however, when you choose modern songs to double check the appropriacy of the lyrics!!!*

When you can't find a song!

There are times when you can't find a suitable song. Why not create your own? A very simple way is to create jazz chants. Jazz chants are rhythmic poems (see Jazz Chants books by Carolyn Graham, OUP).

Creating jazz chants is a great way to develop children's creativity so let the children create their own. Younger children can be given the key vocabulary (e.g. colour words / food items / etc.) and asked to create the rhythm of the chant.

Some recommended songs are:

Year	Thematic Unit	Song
Stage 1: nursery to primary year 1 - 2	Greetings	Tommy Thumb

	Numbers	10 little Indians (or ten little angels / or aeroplanes / etc.)
		1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Once I caught a fish alive
		There were ten in the bed
		Five ducks went for a walk one day
		Five little monkeys bouncing on the bed

	Me (ο εαυτός μου) - parts of the body	Head and Shoulders
		Father Abraham
		Hokey Cokey
		--
Familiarisation and experimentation with sounds of language / intercultural aspects	Skip to my Lou	
	London's burning	
	Are you sleeping?	
	I can sing a rainbow	
Colours	--	
	We wish you a Merry Christmas	
Seasonal	Did you ever see a Bunny? (Easter)	
	Happy Birthday song	

Following instructions	Polly put the kettle on	

	Following a story	If you are happy and you know it --- Miss Polly had a dolly
Stage 2: Year 3 / 4	Some of the songs in the Stage 1 category can be used here again either because children love them or because they might not have been taught in Stage 1. Weather Things I can do Habits Intercultural aspects	Incy Wincy Spider -- The Music Man -- This is the way The wheels on the bus -- She'll be coming round the mountain He's got the whole wide world in his hands Kumbaya Christmas songs (e.g. Rudolph, etc)
Stage 3: Year 5 / 6	Intercultural aspects	Cockles and Mussels Oh! Susanna! Selection of Christmas songs Songs from cultures that children may be communicating with during intercultural projects

A selection of some songs and rhymes websites for very young learners

<http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/songs> a variety of songs with relevant animation

<http://www.kiddles.com/lyrics/subject.html> a large variety of songs organized by subjects (e.g. animals, food, etc.)

<http://www.dltk-teach.com/rhymes/> (songs and rhymes for children, with relevant activities such as colouring pages and handicraft activities)

<http://www.preschooleducation.com/song.shtml> songs for very young learners

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/tweenies/songtime/games/karaoke/> sing Karaoke style with the Tweenies

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/tweenies/songtime/songs/watchnsing.shtml> songs accompanied by video (princess song links well into stories and drama)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/tweenies/songtime/games/copyme/> Tweenies sing action song 'copy me do' and animated cartoon accompanies song

<http://games.greenghoulie.com/songs/fatherabraham.htm> the only version of Father Abraham I could find (video shows actions)

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/Rhymes.html> - a large selection of rhymes ready to be printed out in Rebus style (i.e. using pictograms)

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/rhymes/painting/> children can colour rhyme pictures online – you can also print the page for children to colour the pictures with their pencils, crayons and markers

<http://www.landofnurseryrhymes.co.uk/music.htm> - lyrics and instrumental music for a variety of nursery rhymes

<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/musicchild.htm> - a wide selection of songs and rhymes. The site makes the lyrics and music available (instrumental)

<http://www.singalongwithme.com> – a selection of songs which offers the lyrics and animation illustrating the song